

Religious Work Among The Prisoners

A Message From Dr. Jowett.

"I do not know of any opportunity among all the many opportunities in Europe to do good which is more fraught with promise. The Russian people are essentially a reverent people. This reverence may sometimes express itself in forms of superstition, but nevertheless it is there, a great fruitful awe in the presence of the unseen. I suppose it would be true to say that the Russian people are the most reverent people in Europe. If only that rich bed of reverence could be planted with the seed of the kingdom of our Lord, the harvest would be inconceivable in its range and influence.

"Everybody knows how difficult it has been to evangelize Russia, and how the obstacles have sometimes appeared overwhelming. But now great masses of Russian soldiers are

Church of Christ will not seize this opportunity because of lethargy, self-engrossment, or lack of vision. Russia will be checked in its spiritual development for many years to come, and hundreds of thousands will die without a knowledge of Christ.

America in the War.

While so many are urging "preparedness" of military agencies, there are also many who hold that the hosts of Christian believers should be in the battle, though not with carnal weapons. They believe it a duty to do all in their power to carry the messages of salvation to the millions of war prisoners in the various European countries. As a beginning of this great work, a door has been thrown wide open which will admit the workers to the great prison camps of Germany, Austria and Poland. Besides native Russians, there are

should attempt in the time of peace to reach two millions of men scattered over tens of thousands of towns and villages, it would take many more years, thousands of missionaries would be needed, and it would cost for their support, traveling expenses, the rent of halls, etc., a thousand times as much as to give the Gospel by the printed page to Russian prisoners now in Germany and Austria.

Another reason for urgency is that it is almost impossible to reach the same people in Russia in ordinary times. If the missionary societies should undertake to enter Russia, the privilege may be denied them by the police, and even if permitted to preach many of the men would be too busy to listen, the village priest might arouse opposition and the missionary be attacked and driven away.

After the War.

On the other hand, when the converted soldier returns to his village, he comes not as a stranger, but as a long expected relative and a guest of honor in every house. Then he will tell them of the most wonderful experience in his life: how he received a Gospel tract or book, with the inscription, "A gift of interested Christian friends," and how, in his hours of homesickness, the truth about life through the crucified Christ entered his conscience and made him a new creature.

What power on earth would be able to stop the influence of such transformed lives?

American and European Committees.

An interdenominational committee has been formed in this country to enlist the interest and support of Christian people in his unique and urgent effort. Its members include leaders in evangelistic, missionary, editorial, publication, and other church activities.

In Germany, Mr. Joseph G. Lehmann, secretary Religious Tract Society in Kassel, having access to various detentions camps, has been appointed chairman of a Field Committee. Personally and through German pastors he has for some months distributed literature of various kinds.

A co-operating committee has already been constituted in Sweden,

oners to the simple knowledge of Jesus Christ as a personal Saviour.

The committee proposes to print and distribute, by personal workers in the prison camps, Bibles, Testaments, Gospels and other Scripture portions, beginning with the Russian prisoners and gradually extending as the work advances. A Russian translation of Pilgrim's Progress permits its use if friends will provide funds for printing. It will also print, in the various languages of those it is designed to reach, a variety of other literature of a spiritual character suited to the needs of the work. Among the latter will be addresses in leaflet form by Moody, Spurgeon and other spiritual leaders, which have been most effective in reaching the hearts of men.

The committee desires, if the way opens, to send one or more accredited Russian workers from this country. Who will make it possible?

Every publication will contain the address of our committee with the offer to send Christian literature also to relatives and friends, wherever living, whose addresses the war prisoners desire to send us. This will lead to the continuation of the work, even after the war is over, as the treasured literature finds its way into thousands of cities and hamlets in Russia and other countries.

The Work Already Begun.

Devoted brethren are already at work in the prison camps in both Germany and Austria. Supplies of Scriptures and other booklets are quickly exhausted, owing to the limited number at hand and the eagerness with which they are received. German pastors, theological students, and other trusted workers are the agents used.

A camp at Stargard contained 10,000 prisoners, distributed in 40 companies of 250 each, the groups being in charge of "company leaders," chosen from among the best of the earlier prisoners. The lieutenant willingly aided the circulation of literature by asking each leader to distribute it through his respective company.

In the province of Hamburg alone there are forty-four detention camps, to at least some of which access has already been secured.

News From the Field.

Mr. J. G. Lehmann, chairman of our committee in Germany, writes:

"I have received several parcels from you, through Pastor Moden in Stockholm, and have duly distributed them among the different Russian camps. The books most needed are Bibles, not only New Testaments, and I was very glad to get at least ten Russian Bibles from you. I should be



Fifteen thousand Russian prisoners in Augustowo about to be taken into the interior

interned in Germany and Austria, and the door is open to present to them the Gospel of our Lord. It can be done, not only by the spoken message, but perhaps even more effectively by the printed word. The days of these prisoners are long and they drag wearily on, and therefore they will welcome any form of reading, and pre-eminently I think they will eagerly welcome the story of our Saviour's love.

"I commend the movement to the Christian people of this country. This country has shown its beneficence toward stricken Europe in a hundred ways; in none could that beneficence be more fruitfully expressed than in sending the evangel of the Lord Jesus to these great multitudes of Russian prisoners.

"With good wishes,

"Yours sincerely,

"J. H. Jowett,

"Pastor Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York.

A Neglected Empire.

Russia is the largest empire of white people that has ever existed. Its people have never been greatly stirred by the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In their own land they can be reached with the greatest difficulty, but just now multitudes of war prisoners herded in the concentration camps of a strange land become peculiarly susceptible to gospel influence. There are over 2,000,000 Russian and other prisoners interned in Germany and Austria. What a twentieth century Pentecost may be in store for the Christian Church if these hordes of prisoners can be reached by the Gospel and go back after the war to evangelize the millions of their compatriots. If the

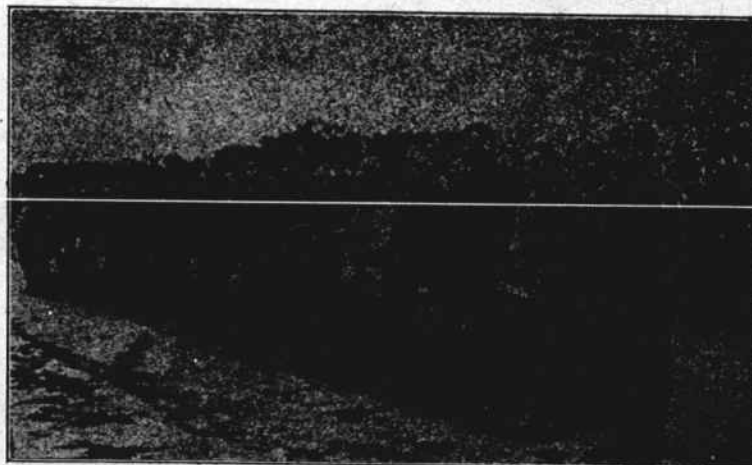
Letts, Estonians, Calmuks, Kirghises, Crusins, Mingrels, Lithunians, Poles, Mohammedans, Jews, Cossacks in great numbers, and natives of Little and White Russia. Away from their native land and home, separated from all of their usual occupations, with scarcely anything to do, with very little, if any, literature in their native language, filled with melancholy longings for something that is beyond their reach, and heartsick when they think of their homeland—nothing could be imagined more sad or pitiful than the condition of these multitudes of prisoners of war.

The Opportunity a Challenge.

Such an opportunity may never occur again. It is a great challenge to the Christian Church, especially in the United States. This country is practically the only great free country not touched by the war's horrors. Many Americans have made large profits out of the war. Alongside of the story of riches thus acquired, another story could be written on a pure white page—the story of America evangelizing the soldiers and prisoners who are engaged in the great European struggle. The American Christian churches can write this story if they choose. Surely when the world is awake to see its opportunity, the Church should be equally vigilant. Many prominent leaders in the Church, who have been observant of spiritual conditions in Europe, see in the present situation an unmistakable invitation to spiritual effort. It is the war of the Gospel as distinguished from the war of the sword and cannon.

Why Act at Once?

Prompt action on this plan will save the Church of Christ much money and energy. If the Christian Church



Russian prisoners awaiting their rations after the day's work

with headquarters at Stockholm. The friendly relation of Sweden to both the United States and to the nations at war renders the part to be taken by this committee especially important.

The Plan in Detail.

The aim of this movement is not proselyting, but leading the war pris-

thankful if you could continue sending such Bibles. Russian hymn-books also are asked and other good Christian literature in Russian. It is a very great blessing that so many of the Russian prisoners long for this literature and appreciate it and that not a few have found Christ, their Saviour."

Mr. H. Ruger, in Hameln: "Best